

assault.

***Eliminating Medicare Waiting Period - HCR 35***

Under federal law, individuals with disabilities who receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits must wait two years before being eligible to receive Medicare. This is a burdensome requirement that hinders many Texans from receiving the healthcare they need. This session, I sponsored HCR 35, which urges the United States Congress to eliminate this onerous and sometimes deadly waiting period for disabled individuals.

***Mental Health Parity – SB 568***

Finally, I authored SB 568, which would have required a group health plan that provides coverage for mental illness to ensure coverage is equal to that provided for physical illnesses. All too often health plans have co-pays and deductibles for mental illnesses that are disproportionately high or place limits on treatment that prevent people from getting the help they need. This is not only discriminatory, but sends a message that mental illnesses are less important than other illnesses. Senate Bill 568 passed out of the Senate, but did not pass the House. I plan on fighting for this issue again in the next legislative session.

**Protecting Our Environment and Securing Affordable and Efficient Energy Alternatives for Our Future**

Preserving Texas air and water for future generations is an absolute necessity. We can no longer afford to put off the tough decisions on climate change, emissions and energy efficiency. This session, I offered a comprehensive package of environmental initiatives to take action on these issues to preserve our environment, significantly increase our energy efficiency and ensure our state's competitiveness in the decades ahead. While none of these important bills became law, we have now changed the debate in Texas on environmental issues. It is no longer a question of *if*

there will be change in Texas, but *when* there will be change.

The Legislature did win an important fight to help Mayor Bill White's effort to clean Houston's air. Working closely with my Houston-area colleagues, I helped lead the fight to defeat legislation which would have prohibited local governments from regulating pollution from outside their boundaries. Supporters of the bill called it a matter of local control, but air and water pollution doesn't adhere to city or county lines. If the state is not going to step up to the plate and implement policies to clean up our environment then it needs to get out of the way and allow local communities to take action.

Some other bills in the Ellis Environmental package

**Clean Cars - SB 124** - This important legislation would have reduced air pollution from cars and trucks, saved consumers money at the gas pump, boosted our economy and cleaned up our state's air. It is incredibly important that Texas, the biggest polluting state in the nation and the state synonymous with big energy and big oil, stand up and take action on the biggest environmental issue of our time.

**Coal Plant Moratorium - SB 860** - I authored legislation to stall the effort to build 18 new pulverized dirty coal plants in Texas until the state was able to do a comprehensive analysis of the effects such an initiative would have on the air we breathe.

**Global Warming - SB 860** - Everyday we learn of the growing impact global warming has on our state, our nation and our world. Senate Bill 945 would have set Texas on the right path by creating the Texas Commission on Global Warming. The Commission would have studied the effects of global warming on the citizens and businesses of Texas

and worked to find the best solutions for the environmental and economic future our state.

***Hybrid Cars/HOV Lanes - SB 436*** - This bill would have authorized hybrid vehicles to have access to high occupancy vehicle lanes. The more hybrid vehicles on the road, the more we reduce our emissions and our air quality improves.

***Appliance Efficiency Standards - SB 489*** – Perhaps the most simple, effective and widespread way to improve our environment and provide a more secure future is to become more energy efficient. Senate Bill 489 would have established minimum efficiency standards for residential and commercial appliances to save energy.

***Solar Energy Rebates - SB 1357*** – Another way to improve our energy efficiency and security is to provide incentives for alternative energy uses. SB 1357 would have established a rebate program for residents and businesses that begin using solar energy.

***Texas Hotspots - SB 1906*** – One of the more unfortunate aspects of our environmental crisis is that poorer neighborhoods are disproportionately impacted by our policies. SB 1906 would have required the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality implement a plan to lower the toxic air pollution in areas identified on the Air Pollution Watch list.

#### **Enhancing the Sales Tax Holiday**

I passed two bills which will enhance the sales tax holiday that I authored in 1999. One bill will move the sales tax holiday to the third weekend in August. Because the Legislature mandated that public schools have a later start date, moving the sales tax holiday closer to the start of school will enable more people to take